# The Curate of Poltons.

I must confess at once that at first, [ Trix affected dense unconsciousness at least, I very much admired the curate. I am not referring to my admiration of his fine figure-six feet high and straight as an arrow-nor of his handsome, open, ingenuous countenance, or his candid blue eye, or his thick curly hair. No; what won my heart from an early period of my visit to my cousins, the Poltons, of Polton Park, was the fervent, undisguised, unashamed, confident and altogether matter-of-course manner in which he made love to Miss Beatrice Queenborough, only daughter and heiress of the wealthy shipowner, Sir Wagstaff Queenborough, Bart; and Eleanor, his wife. It was purely the manner of the curate's advances that took my fancy; in the mere fact of them there was nothing remarkable. For all the men in the house (and a good many outside) made covert, stealthy and indirect steps in the same direction; for Trix (as her friends called her) was, if not wise, at least pretty and witty, displaying to the material eve a charming figure, and to the mental a delicate hear heartlessness-both attributes which challenge a self-respecting man's best efforts. But then came the fatal obstacle. From heiress in reason a gentleman need neither shrink nor let himself be driven; but when it comes to something like twenty thousand a yearthe reported amount of Trix's dot-he distrusts his own motives almost as much as the lady's relatives distrust them for him. We all felt this-Stanton, Rippleby and I; and, although I will not swear that we spoke no tender words and gave no meaning glances, yet we reduced such concessions to natural weakness to a minimum, not only when Lady Queenborough was by, but at all times. To say truth, we had no desire to see our scalps affixed to Miss Trix's pretty belt, nor to have our hearts broken (like that of the young man in the poem) before she went to Homburg in the autumn.

-Jack Ives, by the way, was his name -appeared to rush, not only upon his fate, but in the face of all possibility and of Lady Queenborough. My cousin and hostess, Dora Polton, was very much distressed about him. She said that he was such a nice young fellow, and that it was a great pity to see him preparing such unhappiness for himself. Nay, I happen to know that she spoke very seriously to Trix, pointed out the wickedness of trifling with him, whereupon Trix, who maintained a bowing acquaintance with her conscience, avoided him for a whole afternoon and endangered all Algy Stanton's prudent resolutions by taking him out in the Canadian cance. This demonstration in no way perturbed the curate. He observed that, as there was played for anything or not), after which he told Dora that the vicar was taking parish church-a piece of information that Mr. Ives could accept an invitation to dinner if one were proffered him.

Dora, very weakly, rose to the bait;

Jack Ives, airily remarking that there

Queenborough: we ought never to be separated."

Dora did not ask the curate to disseized the place next to Trix at dinner Miss Queenborough was really a very his sermon was still unwritten. My vanity of human wishes might be ap-

With the curate it was otherwise. He

"I shall preach," said Mr. Ives, thoughtfully, "on the opportunities of

This resolution he carried out on the next day but one, that being a Sunday. had the pleasure of sitting next to Miss Trix, and I watched her with application which we read into it; for its main burden was no other than this -that wealth should be used by those who were fortunate enough to possess it (here Trix looked down and fidgeted with her prayer-book) as a means of promoting greater union between themselves and the less richly-endowed, and not-as, alas, had too often been the case—as though it were a new barrier set up between them and their (Here Miss Trix fellow-creatures. blushed slightly, and had recourse to her smelling-bottle). "You," said the curate, waxing rhetorical as he addressed an imaginary, but bloated, capitalist, "have no more right to your you to be shared with me." At this point I heard Lady Queenhorough sniff, and Algy Stanton snigger. I stole a glance at Trix and detected a slight waver in the admirable lines of her

"A very good sermon, didn't you think?" I said to her as we walked

"Oh, very," she replied demurely. "Ah, if we followed all we heard in

church," I sighed. Miss Trix walked in silence for a few yards. By dint of never becoming anything else, we had become very good friends; and presently she remarked, quite confidentially: "He's very silly, isn't he?

"Then you ought to snub him," said "So I do-sometimes. He's rather amusing, though."

"Of course, if you're prepared to make the sacrifice involved "Oh, what nonsense!"

"Then you've no business to amuse yourself with him."

"Dear, dear! how moral you are!

The next development in the situation was this: My cousin Dora received a letter from the Marquis of Newhaven, with whom she was acquainted, praying her to allow him to run down Poltons for a few days; he reminded her that she had once given him a general invitation; if it would not be convenient-and so forth. The meaning of this communication did not, of course, escape my cousin, who had wirnessed the writer's attention to Trix in the preceding season, nor did it escape the rest of us (who had talked

over the sad attentions at the club)

nounced that Lord Newhaven would

her mother allowed herself a mysterious smile-which, however, speedily vanished when the curate (he was taking lunch with us) observed in a cheer-

"Newbaven! oh, I remember the chap at the House-plowed twice in Smalls-stumpy fellow, isn't he? Not a his looks. I'm glad he's coming."

"You won't be soon, young man," Lady Queenborough's angry eye seemed to say.

"I remember him," pursued Jack, 'awfully smitten with a tobacconist's daughter in the Corn-oh, it's all right, Lady Queenborough-she wouldn't look at him."

This quasi-apology was called forth by the fact of Lady Queensborough pushing back her chair and making for the door. It did not at all appease her to hear the scorn of the tobacconist's daughter. She glared sternly at Jack and disappeared. He turned to Trix and reminded her-without diffidence and coram populo, as his habit was, that she had promised him a stroll in the west wood

What happened on that stroll I do not know; but meeting Miss Trix on the stairs later in the afternoon, I ventured to remark;

"I hope you broke it to him gently, Miss Queenborough?

"I don't know what you mean, re plied Trix, haughtily. "You were out nearly two hours,"

"Were we?" asked Trix with a start, Good gracious! Where was mamma,

Mr. Wayne?" "On the lawn-watch in hand." Miss Trix went slowly up stairs, and there is not the least doubt that something serious passed between her and her mother, for both of them were in the most atroclous of humors that evening; fortunately, the curate was not there. He had a Bible class.

The next day Lord Newhaven ar-I found him on the lawn when I strolled up, after a spell of letterwriting, about 4 o'clock. Lawn tennis was the order of the day and we were all in flannels

"Oh, here's Mark," cried Dora, seeng me. "Now Mark, you and Mr. Ives had better play against Trix and Lord Newhaven. That'll make a very

"No, no, Mrs. Polton," said Jack Ives. "They wouldn't have a chance. Look here, I'll play with Miss Queenborough against Lord Newhaven and Wynne." Newhaven-whose appearance, by the way, though hardly distinguished, was not quite so ornamental as the curate had led us to expect-looked slightly displeased, but Jack gave him no time for remonstrance. He whisked Trix off and began to serve all in a nothing better to do, we might as well | moment. I had a vision of Lady Queenplay billiards, and proceeded to defeat borough approaching from the house inc in three games of a hundred up (no, it is quite immaterial whether we owing entirely to Newhaven's absurd chivalry in sending all the balls to Jack Ives instead of following the well the evening service-it hapened to be known maxim to "pound away at the the day when there was one at the lady," they beat us. Jack wiped his brow, walked up to the tea table with only relevant in so far as it suggested Trix, and remarked in exultant tones: "We make a perfect couple, Miss

was no use in ceremony among friends, | ner that night, but he dropped in about 9 o'clock to ask her opinion as to the ther mother was just opposite) and hymns on Sunday; and finding Trix walked on the terrace after dinner with and Newhaven in the small drawingher in the moonlight. When the ladies room, he sat down and talked to them. retired he came into the smoking room, This was too much for Trix; she had drank a whisky and soda, said that treated him very kindly and had allowed him to amuse her; but it was charming companion, and apologized Impossible to put up with presumption for leaving us early on the ground that of that kind. Difficult as it was to discourage Mr. Ives, she did it, and good cousin, the 'Squire, suggested he went away with a disconsolate, puzrather grimly that a discourse on the | zled expression. At the last moment however, Trix so far relented as to express a hope that he was coming to tennis tomorrow, at which he bright-ened up a little. I do not wish to be uncharitable-least of all to a charming young lady-but my opinion is that Miss Trix did not wish to set the curate entirely adrift. I think, however, that Lady Queenborough must some interest as Mr. Ives developed his have spoken again, for when Jack did theme. I will not try to reproduce the come to tennis, Trix treated him with sermon, which would have seemed by most freezing civility and hardly-disno means a bad one, had any of our guised disdain, and devoted herself to party been able to ignore the personal Lord Newhaven with as much assiduity as her mother could wish. We men over our pipes, expressed the opinion that Jack Ives' little hour of sunshine was passed, and that nothing

was left to us but to look on at the prosperous, uneventful course of Lord Newhaven's wooing. Trix had had her fun (so Agly bluntly phrased it) and would now settle down to business. "I believe, though," he added. "that the likes the curate a bit, you know." During the whole of the next day-Wednesday-Jack Ives kept away; he had, apparently, accepted the inevitable, and was healing his wounded

heart by strict attention to his parochial duties. Newhaven remarked on money than I have. It is entrusted to his absence with an air of relief, and Miss Trix treated it as a matter of no importance; Lady Queenborough was all smiles, and Dora Polton restricted herself by exclaiming as I sat by her at tea, in a low tone and apropos of nothing in particular: "Oh, wellpoor Mr. Ives!"

But on Thursday there occurred an event, the significance of which passed at the moment unperceived, but which had, in fact, most important results This was no other than the arrival of little Mrs. Wentworth, an intimate friend of Dora's. Mrs. Wentworth had been left a widow early in life; she possessed a comfortable competence; she was not handsome, but she was vivacious, amusing, and, above

all, sympathetic. She sympathized at once with Lady Queenborough in her maternal anxieties, with Trix on her charming romance, with Newhaven on his sweet devotedness, with the rest of us in our obvious desolation-and, after a confidential chat with Dora, she sympathized most strongly with poor Mr. Ives on his unfortunate attachment. Nothing would satisfy her, so Dora told me, except the opportunity of plying Mr. Ives with her soothing balm, and Dora was about to sit down and write him a note, when he strolled in through the drawing-room window, and announced that

his cook's mother was ill, and that would be very much obliged if Mrs. Polton would give him some dinner that evening. Trix and Newhaven happened to enter by the door at the some moment, and Jack darted up to them, and shook hands with the greatest effusion. He had evidently buried all unkindness-and with it, we hoped, his mistaken folly. However that when she told us about it, and an- might be, he made no effort to engross Trix, but took his seat most

worth. His behavior was, in fact, so exemplary that even Lady Queenborough relaxed her severity and condescended to cross-examine him on the morals and manners of the old women of the parish. "Oh the vicars look after them," said Jack and he turned to Mrs. Wentworth again.

There can be no doubt that Mrs. Wentworth had a remarkable power of sympathy. I took her in to dinner, and she was deep in the subject of my "noble and inspiring art" before the soup was off the table. Indeed, I'm sure that my life's ambitions would have been an open book to her by the ime that the joint arrived had not Jack Ives, who was sitting on the lady's other side, cut into the conversation just as Mrs. Wentworth was comparing my early struggles with those of Mr. Carlyle. After this intervention of Jack's I had not a chance. I ate my dinner without the sauce of sympathy, substituting for it a cer-tain amusement which I derived from studying the face of Miss Trix Queenborough, who was placed on the other side of the table. And if Trix did look now and again at Mrs. Wentworth and Jack Ives, I cannot say that her conduct was unnatural. To tell the truth, Jack was so obviously delighted with his new friend that it was quite pleasant-and, as I, say, under the circumrather amusing-to watch them. We felt that the squire was justified in having a hit at Jack when Jack said, in the smoking-room, that he found himself rather at a loss for a subject for his next sermon. "What do you say," suggested my

cousin, puffing at his pipe, "to taking constancy as your next text?" Jack considered the idea for a moment, but then shook his head.

"No. I think," he said, reflectively, that I shall preach on the power of That sermon afforded me-I must coa-

fess it, at the risk of seeming frivolous pant) with the curate in a staid, quasi -very great entertainment. Again I secured a place by Miss Trix-on her eft, Newhaven being on her right, and her face was worth study when Jack ives gave us a most eloquent descrip- him." I was referring to Trix Queenbo tion of the wonderful gift in question. It was, he said, the essence and the crown of true womanliness, and it showed itself—well, to put it quite plainly, it showed itself, according to plainly, it showed itself, according to Jack Ives, in exactly that sort of manner and bearing which so honorably course, named, but she was clearly in- pose Lord Newhaven likes it?" "Your gift, your precious gift," cried the curate, apostrophizing the impersonation of sympathy, "is given to you, not for your profit but for nine. It is yours, but it is a trust to ordinary tones.

be used for me. It is yours, in fact, to be shared with me." At this climax, which must have struck upon her ear with a certain familiarity, Miss Trix Queenborough, notwithstanding the place and occasion, tossed her pretty head and whispered to me, "What hor-In the ensuing week Jack Ives was

lliness of his servant's mother left him stranded, and Dora's kind heart at once offered him the hospitality of her roof. For my part I was glad, for the little drama which now began was not without its interest. It was a pleasant treatment he underwent must have bechange to see Jack genially polite to as trying to his feelings as it was gall Trix Queenborough, but quite indiffer- ing to his pride. ent to her presence or absence, and My sympathy was not premature, for content to allow her to take Newhaven Miss Trix's fascinations, which were infor her partner at tennis as often as she pleased. He himself was often an feet. The seene about the canoe was reabsentee from our games. Mrs. Went-worth did not play and look would sit worth did not play, and Jack would sit the widow forsaken. Then Mrs. Went-I did not know, but it is a fact that she treated poor Newhaven like dirt beneath her feet, and that Lady Queenborough's face began to lose its tranng itself out, and disposed myself to young man. see the process with all the complacency induced by the spectacle of others re-

ceiving punishment for their sins. A little scene which occurred after lunch one day was significant. I was sitting on the terrace, ready booted and preeched, waiting for my horse to be

"Where's Newhaven"" I asked "Oh, I don't always want Lord Newhaven," she exclaimed, petulantly; "I sent him off for a walk-I'm going out in the Canadian canoe with Mr. Ives." "Oh, you are, are you?" said I, smil-

ing. As I spoke Jack Ives ran up to us. "I say, Miss Queenborough," he cried, Tve just got your message saying you'd let me take you on the lake." "Is it a great bore?" asked Trix, with glance-a glance that meant mis-

"I should like it awfully, of course," said Jack; "but the fact is I've promised to take Mrs. Wentworth-before I got your message, you know." Trix drew herself up.

"Of course, if Mrs. Wentworth--she beran.

"I'm very sorry," said Jack. Then Miss Queenborough, forgetting as I hope-or choosing to disregard my presence, leaned forward and asked in her most coaxing tones: "Don't you ever forget a promise,

Mr. Ives?" Jack looked at her. I suppose her dainty prettiness struck him afresh, for he wavered and hesitated "She's gone upstairs," pursued the

tempter, "and we shall be safe away before she comes down again." Jack shuffled with one foot on the

"I tell you what," he said, "I'll ask her if she minds me taking you for a little while before 1-I believe he really thought that he had hit upon a compromise ratisfactory to all parties. If so, he was speed-

ily undeceived. Trix flushed red and answered, angrily: "Pray don't trouble. I don't want to "Perhaps afterwards you might,"

suggested the curate, but now rather

"I'm going out with Lord Newhayen," said she. And she added in an access of uncontrollable annoyance, "Go, please go. I-I don't want you." Jack sheered off, with a look of puzzled shamefacedness. He disappeared into the house. Nothing passed between Miss Trix and myself. A moment later Newhaven came out.

"Why, Miss Queenborough," said ie, in apparent surprise, "Ives is going with Mrs. Wentworth in the cance! In an instant I saw what she had done. In rash presumption she had told Newhaven that she was going with the curate-and now the curate had refused to take her-and Ives had met him in search of Mrs. Wentworth. What could she do? Well, she rose or fell-to the occasion. In the coldest

of voices, she said: "I thought you'd gone for your

"I was just starting," he answered. apologetically, "when I met Ives. But, as you weren't going with himarrive in the middle of the next day. docilely by his hostess-and she, of paused, an inquiring look in his eyes.

course, introduced him to Mrs. Went- He was evidently asking himself why she had not gone with the curate. "I'd rather be left alone, if you don't mind," she said. And then, flushing red again, she added: "I changed my mind and refused to go with Mr. Ives. So he went off to get Mrs. Wentworth

instead." I started. Newhaven looked at her for an instant, and then turned on his heel. She turned to me, quick as lightning, and with her face all aflame, 'If you tell I'll never speak to you

again," she whispered. After this there was silence for some minutes

"Well?" she said, without looking at "I have no remark to offer, Miss Queenborough," I returned. 'I suppose that was a lie, wasn't it?'

he asked, defiantly. "It's not my business to say what it as," was my discreet answer.

"I know what you're thinking."
"I was thinking " said I, "which I would rather be-the man you will murry r the man you would like -- "
"How dare you? It's not true. Mr. Wynne, indeed it's not true."
Whether it were true or not i did not

know. But if it had been Miss Trix Queenborough might have been expected to act very much in the way in which she proceeded to act; that is to say, to be extravagantly attentive to Lord Newhaven when Jack Ives was present, and markedly neglectful of bim in the curate's absence. It also fitted in very well with the theory which I had ventured to hint that her bearing towards Mrs. Went worth was distinguished by a stately civility, and her remarks about that lady by a superfluity of laudation; for if these be not two distinguishing marks of rivalry in the well, bred, I must go back to my favorite books and learn from them -more folly. And if Trix's manners were all that they should be, praise no less high must be accorded to Mrs. Wentworth; she attained an altitude of ad-mirable unconsciousness, and conducted her flirtation (the poverty of language maternal way. She called him a delignt-ful boy, and said that she was intensely interested in all his aims and hopes.
"What does she want?" I asked Dora, despairingly. "She can't want to marry

ough, not to Mrs. Wentworth. shame!"

"Oh, well, he has great recuperative power," said I. and gracefully distinguished Mrs. "She'd better be careful, though. It's Wentworth. The lady was not, of very dangerous game. How do you sup-Accident gave me that very day a hint how little Lord Newhaven liked it, and a glimpse of the risk Miss Trix was running. Entering the library suddenly, I heard Newhaven's voice raised above his

> "I won't stand it," he was declaring, one minute to the next."

My entrance, of course, stopped the conversation very abruptly. Newhaven had come to a stand in the middle of the room, and Lady Queenborough sat on the sofa, withdrawing myself as rap-idly as possible, I argued the probability of a severe lecture for Miss Trix, ending our constant companion; the continued | in a command to try her noble suitor's pa tience no longer. I hope all this happens for 1, not seeing why Mrs. Wentworth should monopolize the grace of sympathy, took the liberty of extending minto Newhaven. He was certainly in love with Trix, not with her money, and the

reached this very absurd situation that these two ladies were contending for the favors of or the domination over such an obscure, poverty-stricken, hopsiently pleasant expression. I had a semed to me then, and still seems, to invague idea that a retribution was work-dicate some remarkable qualities in that

At last Newhaven made a move. At breakfast on Wednesday morning he ar nounced that, reluctant as he should it to leave Poltons Park, he was due at hi unt's place, in Kent, on Saturday even ing, and must, therefore, make his ar rangements to leave by noon on that day The significance was apparent. Had he come down to breakfast with "Now o Never!" stamped in flery letters across his brow, it would have been more ob-trusive, indeed, but not a whit plainer We all looked down at our plates, ex cept Jack Ives. He flung one glance (I saw it out of the corner of my left eye) at Newhaven, another at Trix; then h

marked kindly: "We shall be uncommonly sorry lose you, Newhaven."
Events began to happen now, and will teil them as well as I am able, sup-plementing my own knowledge by what l learned afterwards from Dora-she hav ing learned it from the actors in the scene. In spite of the solenin warning conveyed in Newhaven's intimation Trix, greatly daring, went off immediately after funch for what she described as "a long ramble" with Mr. 1vcs. There was, indeed, the excuse of an old wo man at the end of the ramble, and Trix provided Jack with a small basket of comforts for the useful old body; but the ramble was, we felt, the thing, and was much annoyed at not being able t company the walkers in the cloak of darkness. Indeed, it was half-past 10 before Trix, alone, walked up the drive. Newhaven, a solitary figure, paced up and down the terrace fronting the drive. Trix came on, her head thrown back and a steady smile on her lips. She saw New ment with what she afterwards described as an indescribable smile on his face but not, as Dora understood from her by any means a pleasant one. Yet, if not pleasant, there is not the least doubt in the world that it was highly signifint, for she cried out nervously

Why are you looking at me like that What's the matter?" Newhaven, still saying nothing, turned is back on her and made as if he would walk into the house and leave her there, ignored, discarded, done with. She, realizing the crisis which had come, forge ting everything except the municent dan ger of losing him once for all, without time for long explanation or any roundabout seductions, ran forward, laying her hand in his arm and blurting out:
"But I've refused him."

1 do not know what Newhaven think: ow, but I sometimes doubt whether h would not have been wiser to shake of way, first into the house, and ultimately to his aunt's. But (to say nothing of the wenty thousand a year, which, after all, and be you as remantic as you may blease to be, is not a thing to be sneezed (t) Trix's face, its mingled eagerness and hame, its flushed cheeks and shinging yes, the piquancy of its unwonted hu-nility, overcame him. He stopped dead. "I-I was obliged to give him an-an opportunity," said Miss Trix, having the race to stumble a little in her speech And—and it's all your fault."

The war was thus, by happy audacity, erried into Newhaven's own quarters, "My fault?" he exclaimed. "My fau "My fault nat you walk all day with that curate!" Then Miss Trix-and let no irrelevant ensiderations may the appreciation of acting-dropped her eyes and murmured softly:

"I-I was so terribly afruid of seeming o expect you.' Wherewith she (and not he) ran away, lightly, up the stairs, turning just one glance downwards as she reached the JONAS LONG'S SONS.

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selow with an "enchanted" smile-the from the boudeir. It was followed aiword is Trix's own; I should probably have used a different of Was then the curate of Poltons utterly

defeated-brought to his knees, only to be spurned? It seemed so; and he came down to dinner that night with a subdued and melancholy expression. 'on the other hand, was brilliant talkative to the last degree, and the gayty spread from her all around the table, eaving untouched only the rejected over and Mrs. Wentworth; for the last named lady, true to her distinguishing quality, had begun to talk to poor Jack

ves in low, soothing tones. After dinner Trix was not visible; but he door of the little boudeir beyond stood open, and very soon Newhaven edged his way through. Almost at the same moment Jack Ives and Mrs. Went-worth passed out of the window and began to walk up and down the gravel. No-body but myself appeared to notice these remarkable occurrences, but I watched them with keen interest. Half an hour passed and then there smote on my

most immediately by a tranger sound from the gravel walk. Then; all in a moment, two things happened. The bo doir door opened, and Trix, followed by Newhaven, came in smiling; from the window entered Jack Ives and Wentworth. My eyes were on the curate. He gave one sudden, comprehending glance towards the other counter the ne took the widow's hand, led her up to Dora, and said, in low yet penetrating

"Will you wish us joy, Mrs. Polton?" The Squire, Rippleby, and Algy Stan-ton were 'round them in an instant. I kept my place watching now the face of then very pale. I saw her turn to New then very pale. I saw her turn to New-haven and speak one or two imperative words to him. Then, drawing herself up to her full height she rossed the room to where the group were assembled 'round Mrs. Wentworfth and Jack Ives. "What's the matter? What are you saying?" she asked. Mrs. Wentworth's eyes were modestly

landing. Newhaven was looking up from watchful ear the sound of a low laugh cast down, but a smile played 'round her

Then Jack Ives said "Mrs. Wentworth has promised to be For a moment, hardly perceptible, Trix nesitated; then, with the most winning.

touching, sweetest smiles in the world

So you took my advice, and our afteroon walk was not wasted after all? flights of diplomacy; she had heard be-fore dinner something of what had ac-tually happened in the afternoon; and simple woman positively

"Not at all wasted," said he with a mile. "Not only has it shown me where my true happiness lies, but it has also given me a juster idea of the value and incerity of your regard for me, Miss

'It is as real. Mr. Ives, as it is sin-'It is like yourself, Miss Queenbor

[Continued on Page 10.]